

## Security Quickie 32 - Fraud and Identity Theft

Picture if you will, a young lady, named Elise, out for her morning shopping. She drops her children off at school, goes to the department store to pick out a few birthday presents for her young son, and chooses a new dress for herself. She then visits the nearby grocery store to purchase a cake, candles, and some chocolate ice cream for later that evening. She returns home, thinking that she's only spent \$200 during her shopping day, when in fact her bill for today's credit charges are \$4000.



It seems a certain unscrupulous person, in Russia, Nigeria, or perhaps in her own city, has used her credit card account and other personal information to purchase items or services unknown. Has Elise stepped into the Twilight Zone, over the threshold of reason and twisted logic into that realm of darkly imagined and fearfully improbable reality?

Sadly, no. She is just another statistic for identity theft, an unfortunate member of the growing group of humanity known as 'fraud victims'. And while Elise lives in a vibrant world of color, the reality of identity theft is all too black and white – it's a crime, and it's growing every day.

Any of us could become a victim of fraud or identity theft. It could result from our inadvertently sharing personal information on the Internet, or someone finding a credit card application in our trash. It could also happen outside of our control, like when a hacker steals a customer database from a large credit card company or one of its 'associates' - an event that is recurring with disturbing frequency and seriousness. It is our responsibility, as well as the responsibility of businesses and governments who hold such, to protect what personal information we can.

We can help safeguard our personal and financial information in the following ways:

- Shred correspondence that contains personal identifiers before throwing them away. (Receipts, credit offers, subscription information, and the like.)
- Do not give out personal information over the phone. If someone asks you for personal information like a credit card number or a social security number, ask yourself "Who are they really, and why do they need my personal information?"
- Check your credit statements every month. If you do find suspicious activity on your account inform your credit company immediately. The Iowa Attorney General's Office has a good list of things to do, as does the FTC, in case of credit fraud or identity theft.

- There are a lot of account and credit card scams. AOL, eBay, Discover, and other companies are being used for falsifying confirmation requests and account verifications. If you receive an email questioning your account status or information, call the company number directly to verify their request.

Iowa - How to Avoid Identity Theft

[http://www.state.ia.us/government/ag/consumer/brochures/avoid\\_identitytheft.html](http://www.state.ia.us/government/ag/consumer/brochures/avoid_identitytheft.html)

Iowa - A Guide for Victims of Identity Theft

[http://www.state.ia.us/government/ag/consumer/brochures/identitytheft\\_victims.html](http://www.state.ia.us/government/ag/consumer/brochures/identitytheft_victims.html)

Iowa - File a Consumer Fraud Complaint

[http://www.state.ia.us/government/ag/consumer/file\\_consumer.html](http://www.state.ia.us/government/ag/consumer/file_consumer.html)

FTC Consumer Complaint Form

[https://rn.ftc.gov/dod/wsolcq\\$.startup?Z\\_ORG\\_CODE=PU01](https://rn.ftc.gov/dod/wsolcq$.startup?Z_ORG_CODE=PU01)

FTC Identity Theft Complaint Form

[https://rn.ftc.gov/dod/widtpubl\\$.startup?Z\\_ORG\\_CODE=PU03](https://rn.ftc.gov/dod/widtpubl$.startup?Z_ORG_CODE=PU03)

ITD is building a new Identity Security Site. Check it out for information regarding identity, privacy, and associated security issues.

<http://das.ite.iowa.gov/security/idsecurity/>

And lastly, some real numbers for the fraud and ID theft problem in our corner of the world. (FTC report for Iowa, 2002)

Fraud: 1,540 reported cases

Reported Losses due to fraud: \$1,184,789

Identity Theft: 552 reported cases

<http://www.consumer.gov/sentinel/sentinel-trends/iowa.pdf>

(Reported cases of both fraud and identity theft have increased 40% for 2 years in a row.)

\*(Picture of Rod Serling, Twilight Zone)